

THE CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATING THE COVENANT: GOD'S INESCAPABLE JUDGMENT JEREMIAH 11:11–12:06

Introduction

When any covenant or agreement is broken, the consequences are usually very disturbing and sometimes catastrophic. Breaking an agreement leads to a loss of trust between the parties, whether between individuals or nations. Failure to keep a covenant can cause such tragedies as divorce; a failed business venture; loss of employment, promotion, or position; loss of home, property, or wealth; a broken engagement or friendship; loss of life; and even war.

God and His people had made a covenant — an agreement — with each other, but the people had broken it. The broken covenant is the subject of this Scripture. *This is, The Broken Covenant or Agreement Between God and His People*, Jeremiah 11:1-12:6.

- I. The people's broken covenant: had promised to obey God (vv. 11:1-10).
- II. The consequences of violating the covenant: God's inescapable judgment (vv. 11:11-12:6).

Jeremiah 11:11–12:6 The Consequences of Violating the Covenant: God's Inescapable Judgment

The people had broken their covenant, their commitment to follow and obey the LORD. AS a result, they had to bear the consequences of their disobedience and wicked behaviour. What were the consequences? The inescapable judgment of God. Jeremiah's task was not only to point out the sins of the people but also to declare the price they would pay for continuing on in their sins. And the price was steep. God's judgment was certain and it would be devastating.

1. This is what the LORD Himself said about the consequences of breaking His covenant. Through His prophet Jeremiah, God Himself declared that He would bring a disaster, a terrible calamity, upon the people and their nation. This was a clear reference to the Babylonian invasion and devastation of the nation (see notes, 2 Chr 36:14-23).

When God's judgment fell, it would be inescapable. The people had gone too far in their sins and were beyond the point of ever repenting. Thus the midnight hour had arrived; the time for God's warnings had passed; and now the judgment would be fulfilled. Nothing, absolutely nothing, would be able to save God's people from His judgment. The people of that day would suffer six grave consequences for their sins:

- ⇒ Their cries to God would not be heard (v. 11). Although the people would cry out to the LORD, it would be too late.
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- => Their cries for help from false gods would not save them (v. 12).
 - => Their cries to the greatest of the false gods, Baal, would not save them. (v. 13). Note that the people had as many gods as they had cities. Apparently each city had its own god, with Baal being the chief god that most people worshipped.
 - => The prayers offered by Jeremiah or any other prophet would not save them when judgment began to fall (v. 14). In fact, God actually instructed Jeremiah not to pray for them.
 - => Their worship — the giving of more offerings and sacrifices — would not save them (v. 15).
 - => Their godly parents or forefathers would not save them (v. 16). The LORD had called Israel to be a thriving green olive tree, a tree that would bear much fruit. But in the day of judgment, the tree would be set afire, destroyed due to the sins of the people.
2. The coming judgment was a certainty, already decreed (v. 17). The day had already been set, and it could not be changed. Note the reasons why: the people had refused to turn from their evil behaviour and their false worship. Their wicked, idolatrous lifestyle had provoked God to anger.

John 5:28-29 *“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”*

Acts 17:31 *For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”*

Rom 2:16 *This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.*

Rom 14:12 *So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.*

Heb 9:27 *Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.*

2 Pet 2:9 *If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.*

2 Pet 3:7 *By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.*

Jude 1:14-15 *Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: “See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”*

Rev 20:11-15 *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they*

had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

3. The people reacted against the preaching of Jeremiah (vv. 18-23). They wanted nothing to do with a prophet who pointed out their sins, God's demand for righteousness, and the inevitability of God's judgment on the wicked. Jeremiah's preaching apparently cut their hearts to the core, for they were hatching a plot against his life. Sadly, the people of his own town, Anathoth, took the lead in the plot against him.

Because Jeremiah genuinely loved the people of his community, in particular his family and fellow priests, he was deeply wounded by their mistreatment and persecution of him. But this was just the first of many personal crises that Jeremiah faced throughout his ministry (15:1-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-18; 26:1-29:32).

Note that the LORD Himself revealed the plot to His dear prophet (v. 18). Jeremiah's response was utter shock, for he had suspected nothing. When he learned that men were planning to kill him in order to silence his message, he realized that he had been like a lamb being led to slaughter (v. 19). The evil intention of his enemies was to erase his name from the face of the earth so that he would be remembered no more.

Jeremiah did the only thing he could: he prayed. He asked God to execute true justice and judgment on the evildoers (v. 20). There was no hope of defending himself or persuading his enemies to change their minds. Thus he placed his cause in God's hands, trusting Him for justice and vengeance. The LORD's response was twofold:

- => The persecutors' plot would not succeed (v. 21). The evildoers would not be able to kill Jeremiah or to stop his message. God's Holy Word would continue to be proclaimed.
 - => The persecutors and their families would be punished for their wicked behaviour (vv. 22-23). Not a single descendant of the evildoers would be left alive. A disaster would strike the men of Anathoth (v. 23). Most likely, this is a reference to the young men of the city dying in battle against the Babylonians and the rest of the citizens dying from famine brought on by the enemy invaders' destruction.
4. Jeremiah was so distressed by the treachery of his family and friends that he asked the LORD a burning question, a question that people have asked down through the ages: Why do the wicked seem to prosper while so many of the righteous suffer (12:1-6)? Note that this question concerned God's justice and judgment. Jeremiah acknowledged the fact that God is righteous, that He does execute justice on earth, and that He will continue to execute justice. But the question that puzzled him was why God blessed the wicked when they were so hypocritical, when their lips professed the LORD but their hearts were far from Him (v. 2). It seemed as though the

wicked lived comfortable, easy lives, prospering and being blessed by the LORD. Yet, they were anything but righteous. At best, they were hypocrites who professed to be followers of the LORD while living sinful lives.

Jeremiah confessed that God knew his heart and that, in contrast to the hypocrisy of the wicked, his heart was righteous (v. 3). The LORD knew him perfectly; He saw Jeremiah's faith and behaviour. He even tested the prophet's thoughts. The LORD knew that his thoughts were filled with God and His righteousness. Although Jeremiah may have been suffering far more than the wicked of the earth, he would not deny his faith in the LORD. To the contrary, he cried out for true justice — that the LORD would punish the wicked in the day of slaughter, the day of His coming judgment.

Clearly, Jeremiah's own suffering and the sufferings of other godly people were breaking the prophet's heart. He wondered just how long the land and the godly must suffer the chastisement of the LORD (v. 4). In the past, when the LORD executed His judgment against the wicked, the righteous also suffered. When the LORD disciplined the sinful through droughts, conquests, and destruction, the righteous who lived in the land suffered due to the sins of the wicked. Although the righteous were living godly lives, they suffered right along with the wicked. Even the innocent animals and birds perished due to the judgment of famine, conquest, and destruction.

Note that despite God's continued chastisement, some of the people in Jeremiah's day believed that God would not utterly destroy them (v. 4b). After all, they professed to follow the LORD and His Word, and they had the temple and the wonderful promises of God. No matter how wickedly they lived or what sinful deeds they did, they felt secure in the LORD. But their feelings were untrustworthy, giving them a false sense of security. God's response made this perfectly clear He actually warned Jeremiah that he would need greater courage and more faith in the future, for two reasons:

- => The future would be far tougher, so tough that it would be like racing against horses or in a thicket (v. 5).
- => The future persecution of the prophet would be far more fierce (v. 6). Jeremiah must not even trust the members of his own family (v. 6). They would turn against him, using deception and flattery to secure his trust, while at the same time speaking against his message and plotting against him.

Thought 1. Believers who truly live for the LORD and bear strong testimony for Him will suffer persecution. Frankly, most people want little to do with the righteous, those who seek to keep the commandments of God. Most people want to fulfil the lusts of their flesh, to follow the immoral ways of this world, such as watching pornographic material and engaging in illicit sexual pleasure. They want the right to pursue their desires for the things of this world like power, authority, and wealth. They want to hear nothing about sacrificing to meet the needs of the world or carrying the gospel to the ends of the earth. Therefore, when righteous people point out the sins of the

world and God's demands that we give all we are and have to Him, most people want nothing to do with the message or the messenger. In fact, many people, cults, societies, and even nations persecute believers who preach the righteousness of God and the need for true justice among people. Listen to what God's Holy Word says about the persecution of true believers:

Mat 10:16-22 *"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved."*

Mat 24:9 *"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me."*

Luke 21:12 *"But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name."*

John 15:20 *"Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also."*

John 16:2 *"They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God."*

Heb 11:36-38 *Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated — the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.*

2 Tim 3:12 *In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

Rev 2:10 *Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

Jer 15:15 *LORD, you understand; remember me and care for me. Avenge me on my persecutors. You are long-suffering — do not take me away; think of how I suffer reproach for your sake. ■*